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ABSTRACT

In this lesson plan, the city of Malibu (CA) is at the mercy of the weather phenomenon El Nino. The press secretary for the Mayor of Malibu recognizes an opportunity to turn this potential natural disaster into a re-election campaign. A task force will be assembled to protect the lives and property of the community. Students role play members of the task force, including City Manager, President of the Chamber of Commerce, leader of the Citizens Patrol team, and the Mayor's press secretary. Students research El Nino, forecast possible disaster scenarios, and provide recommendations for effectively responding to these scenarios. Students are provided with background information, detailed instructions, online resources, and reflection questions. The teacher's notes describe the unit's purpose, explain the application of history/social science standards, and suggest teaching strategies. (BT)

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Schools of California Online Resources for Education (SCORE): Connecting California's Classrooms to the World

EL NINO ELECTION

12th Grade Lesson by David R. Mac Donald and Michael S. Karayan

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The El Nino Election

You just received the latest polling data for the your boss, the Mayor of Malibu. Unfortunately for you and the Mayor, it looks like you may both need to find a new source of income after the upcoming election. It seems the people of Malibu feel as though their Mayor has lost touch with the people and their most basic needs. As the Mayor's press secretary, it is your duty to make the Mayor look good and provide for him/her every opportunity to shine in the eyes of his/her constituents. As you search for anything positive to raise ratings, you come across an article in the newspaper related to the weather phenomenon, El Nino. According to the report your city is again going to be at the mercy of Mother Nature. For many this news is awful, for you it means an answer to prayer.

After getting the Mayor's ear, you outline your plan to boost his ratings and secure another victory in the upcoming election. You explain the concept of an El Nino Election, an idea that if worked properly will allow the Mayor to take an active role in saving the lives and property in this majestic community. Through the auspices of the Mayor's office, you are going to arrange a task force made up of prominent city leaders and officers. The task force will include the City Manager, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the leader of the Citizens Patrol team and, of course, you.

After contacting everyone individually and securing agreements, you arrange a press conference for the Mayor to announce his intentions. Through proper planning and the Mayor's guidance, a plan is going to be formulated by the aforementioned people that will guide the citizens of Malibu through the upcoming El Nino winter. Before you get too excited it would be important to remember that you haven't done anything yet, and the important questions do not yet have answers.

Your job begins this way,

Dear Members of the El Nino Task Force,

As I am sure you are all aware, the predicted El Nino figures to be the strongest ever recorded. As citizens of Malibu, you and I know of the destruction that has faced us in the past. Your job is to plan and strategize ways to overcome the potential for disaster and in the event disaster does strike, a way to minimize the pain. In order to accomplish this I have prepared a series of questions for you to answer and, when completed, I expect a written report detailing an approach I can take to guide our citizens through this trying time. I know you can do it and remember, I'm just like time, I wait for no one.

1. What is an El Nino? How and when do they occur?

2. What are some of the problems we can expect here in Malibu as a result of El Nino?

3. In the event disaster does strike, how do we get FEMA here? What is the most amount of help we can expect from FEMA?

4. Do we have a part of town in need of a special evacuation procedure if flood or mudslides occur?

5. What steps do we take to get the Red Cross involved?

6. What are the available shelters here in town?

7. What are the economic costs associated with El Nino here in Malibu?

8. What businesses here in town stand to be affected the most?

9. Do we have a FAQ(Frequently Asked Questions) regarding El Nino that we can make available to our citizens to help them?

10. Where can citizens get sandbags? Do we have anyone available to help the elderly sandbag their homes?

11. What would be the best ways to disseminate this information once we've collected all of it?

12. Last, but not least, what's the best thing the Mayor's office can do for the citizens of this town?

Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to the wonderful citizens of this town.

Sincerely,

James Needsyourhelp

The Task

Your team is assigned the task of researching and generating as much useful information as possible on El Nino for both the Mayor and the citizens of Malibu. You should do this in a professional manner keeping in mind that your actions can and will have a lasting effect on the city and its people. Your research should address the questions raised by the Mayor and when you are done, you need to prepare written recommendations so that the mayor can effectively lead his citizens through this potentially catastrophic event.

The Process

Try to stay within this framework:

A. Determine which of you is going to assume each identity.(Chamber President, Press Secretary, Citizens Patrol and City Manager)

B. Divide the research questions among you based on their applicability to your job. Don't be afraid to allow questions to overlap as each of you may be able to answer the same question but in a different way.

C. When finished with your findings, share them with each other and put together a package of information that best answers the Mayor's questions and provides an effective level of preparedness for the citizens of Malibu.

D. Lastly, be prepared to present your information in a variety of ways to the Mayor. It is important that you do this because the citizens of Malibu are a diverse group and all have different levels of access to information. What may work for some may not work for all but all need to get the information.

Resources

World Wide Web Sites

National Weather Service Los Angeles/Oxnard
www.wsla.noaa.gov/

Malibu Chamber of Commerce
www.malibu.org

NOAA El Nino Site
www.ogp.noaa.gov/enso

USA TODAY El Nino Site
www.usatoday.com/weather/nino/wnino0.html

Federal Emergency Management Association
www.fema.gov/nwz97/elnino.html

City of Malibu(Government)
www.ci.malibu.ca.us

Electronic Mail
info@malibu.org

Other resources:

Relevant Newspaper Articles

Learning Advice

It is important for you to remember that your job is to support the Mayor as well as provide needed information to the town's people. Your failure to do so could result in the loss of life, property and the Mayor's job. While the phenomenon known as El Nino cannot be accurately predicted, you would be wise to prepare the citizens of Malibu for the worst and hope for the best. You are looking for solutions regarding a general lack of information. Knowledge is power and your job is to make people powerful.

Evaluation

You and your team will be evaluated on the thoroughness of your research, the quality of your recommendations, and the organization of your presentation to the Mayor.

Conclusion

This activity is designed to raise awareness about the decision making process that goes on every day in our local city governments. In light of what you have learned about the city of Malibu, how might El Nino effect your community. What steps have been taken in your town in preparation for severe weather or other natural disasters. On a more personal level it would be wise to consider just what you and your family have planned as a response to mother nature. We often fall into the trap of 20/20 hindsight where we plan to succeed only after we failed to plan. Don't be in a position waiting for your city to help you, first be ready to help yourself.

Reflection

Spend a moment considering the work you have just completed. Then pick one of the following questions to answer and write a short response as part of your evaluation.

1. If you were the Mayor of your city, what would you do to make your town safer in the event of a natural disaster?

2. Consider your surrounding environment. In what way might you harness the power of an El Nino for the betterment of your community?

Teacher Notes

Grade Level/Unit

Grade 12 City Government

Length of Lesson

2-3 weeks depending on how involved you want students to become. If you assign email as a component you will have to allow extra time, since the students can't control the outcome.

Lesson Purpose

Students become involved in the decision-making dynamics of city government where decisions can cost money, lives and votes.

Standards

Draft H/SS Standards Grade 12: Students describe and evaluate the means that citizens use to monitor and influence the public agenda and decision making of government institutes through such means as voting, campaigning, lobbying, filing a legal challenge, etc.

Students evaluate issues regarding campaigns for national, state, and local elective office.

Language Arts Grade 12: Listening and Speaking: Students formulate adroit judgments about oral communication. They deliver focused and coherent presentations of their own that convey clear and distinct perspectives and solid reasoning. They incorporate gestures, tone, and vocabulary tailored to audience and purpose.

Lesson Setup

This lesson is designed for the students to take an active role in their learning and to make decisions within their groups. It is designed for groups of four and for the groups to decide amongst themselves the duties and tasks. If for some reason the students express a difficulty in doing this you can assign the duties in this way:

1. Citizens Group- Devise a FAQ, provide local storm watch information
2. City Manager- Identify potential storm problems, outline solutions
3. Chamber President- Examine economic impact disseminating information
4. Press Secretary- Determine emergency procedures, liaison for Mayor

With the help of your class, you should devise a rubric to help shape the lesson and its completion. This will help to guide the students and keep them on task.

Materials Needed

Internet access is a must, and access to email for students is recommended but not required.

Interdisciplinary Connections

The lesson intertwines with Language Arts and Science as the students are asked to research a variety of materials.

Adaptations for Special Needs Students

1. Expand the size of your groups to allow for more cooperation amongst team members.

2. Allow for more time so that all students have sufficient use of the resources.

3. Modify sections of the lesson as necessary to fit the needs of the students.

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